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ABSTRACT

As educators continue to restructure schools to better meet the needs of society, the principal's effective leadership practices become paramount. This report of a descriptive study of principals in a large urban school district examines the differences in middle-school and high-school teachers' perceptions of the leadership practices of educational leaders. The sample consists of 242 participants from 12 middle schools and 404 participants from 14 high schools. Each participant was administered Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Practices Inventory, which identified the teachers' perceptions of their principals' leadership practices in each of five dimensions: (1) challenging the process; (2) inspiring a shared vision; (3) enabling others to act; (4) modeling the way; and (5) encouraging the heart. Using a 95 percent level of confidence, no significant differences were identified between the means of the responses of middle-school and high-school teachers for any of the five practices: Middle-school and high-school teachers reported similar perceptions of their principals' leadership practices. Additional analysis indicates that both middle-school and high-school principals most often exhibited the practices of "enabling others to act" and "modeling the way" and least often demonstrated the behavior of "encouraging the heart." (Contains 1 table and 16 references.) (Author/WFA)

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The Leadership Practices Of Middle and High School Principals

Donald W. Leech, Ed.D.
Valdosta State University
dwleech@valdosta.edu

C. Ray Fulton, Ph.D.
University of Mississippi
rfulton@olemiss.edu

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Abstract

As educators continue to restructure schools to better meet the needs of our ever-changing society, the principal's effective leadership practices become paramount as we enter next generation of research into school effectiveness. This study of principals in a large urban school district endeavors to examine the differences in middle and high school teachers' perceptions of the leadership practices of educational leaders. Leadership behaviors were analyzed through the lens of Kouzes and Posner's (1997) leadership model.

The sample consisted of 242 participants from 12 middle schools and 404 participants from 14 high schools. These respondents represented a 35% rate of return from the 1841 teachers surveyed and 22% of the total secondary teachers in the school system. Each of the participants were administered Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Practices Inventory which identified the teachers perceptions of their principal's leadership practices in each of five dimensions (a) challenging the process, (b) inspiring a shared vision, (c) enabling others to act, (d) modeling the way, and (e) encouraging the heart.

Using a 95% level of confidence, no significant differences were identified between the means of the responses of middle and high school teachers for any of the five practices. Therefore, middle and high school teachers reported very similar perceptions of their principals' leadership practices. Additional analysis indicates that both middle and high school principals most often exhibited the practices of "enabling others to act" and "modeling the way" and least often demonstrated the behavior of "encouraging the heart".

The Leadership Practices
Of Middle and High School Principals

Introduction

A review of the literature on school reform and restructuring reveals that the school principal is the key player in all successful school reform efforts. Two decades ago A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Educational Excellence, 1983) specifically recommended strong leadership as a means for school improvement. Effective schools research also recognized the importance of quality leadership by consistently identifying strong instructional leadership as instrumental in creating a positive school climate. Furthermore, effective schools studies have consistently identified strong instructional leadership by the principal as a correlate of high-achieving schools (Edmonds, 1979). Effective leadership becomes paramount to schools as they answer the call for accountability and continuously improve the quality of students' educational experiences. Therefore, it is vital for us as practitioners, teachers and researchers of educational leadership to explore this sometimes murky notion of principal leadership.

This descriptive study of principals in a large urban school district endeavors to examine the differences in middle and high school teachers' perceptions of the leadership practices of educational leaders. The research was guided by two questions:

- What are the leadership practices of middle and high school principals?
- What differences exist in the leadership practices of middle and high school principals?

This study adds to the broad body of knowledge concerning the leadership behaviors of school principals. Exploring the teachers' perceptions of their principals' leadership behaviors better equips present and future principals with the tools to create a school climate conducive to improving student achievement.

A Discussion of School Leadership

The preponderance of research on effective schools and successful school restructuring has found effective leadership to be a necessary component. Sergiovanni (1984, p. 6) described school leadership in terms of five forces.

- Technical. Derived from sound management.
- Human. Derived from harnessing available social and interpersonal resources.
- Educational. Derived from expert knowledge about matters of education and schooling.
- Symbolic. Derived from focusing the attention of others on matters of importance to the school.
- Cultural. Derived from building a unique school culture.

It could be argued that in order to meet the challenges of leading today's schools, leaders must rely more on applying elements from research of cultural, transformational, and participatory leadership. To this end, Sergiovanni (1994a) proposed that the traditional view of schools as formal organizations is a constraint on school improvement. Instead he recommended that schools be perceived as communities, in order that meaningful personal relationships and shared values become the foundation for school reform. In becoming purposeful communities, schools provide the structure necessary to develop a culture of empowerment, collegiality, and transformation. The leadership of the school community does not rely on "power over" others but on "power through" others to accomplish shared visions and goals (p. xix).

Effective leaders of school communities possess the following characteristics:

- They will be people of substance.
- They will be people who stand for important ideas and values.
- They will be people who are able to share their ideas with others in a way that invites them to reflect, inquire, and better understand their own thoughts about the issues at hand.
- They will be people who use their ideas to help others come together in a shared consensus.
- They will be people who are able to make the lives of others more sensible and meaningful. (Sergiovanni, 1994b, p. 6)

In a study of urban high school teachers, Blase (1987) identified several characteristics of effective school leadership. The results of the study revealed that effective principals promoted positive interactions between school staff, students, and parents. Most importantly, effective leaders created cohesive cultural and social structures in their schools. Current and future principals must endeavor to develop "people related competencies" (p. 608).

If leadership is defined as "an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (Rost, 1991, p. 102), then one of the most important concepts in leadership is the nature of relationships. Leadership is no longer thought of as contingent upon situations: leadership styles are always dependent on a concept defined by personal relationships. The new concept of leadership has, at its foundation, relationships where "different settings and people evoke some qualities from us and leave others dormant" (Wheatley, 1992, p. 34). Through their daily interactions with the members of an organization, leaders reinforce the desired values and behaviors of those members (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Schein, 1992; Sergiovanni, 1986, 1992, 1994a). Therefore, principals lead their schools through relationships, not rules, tasks, or structures.

Through their research, Kouzes and Posner (1995) identified human relations skills as the means by which leaders promote success within organizations. Based on both qualitative and quantitative empirical research, Kouzes and Posner (1995) identified five effective leadership practices that elicit peak performance from organizations. The five practices identified are:

1. Challenging the process--the leadership practice of constantly searching for opportunities to change the status quo. Leaders are seeking innovation--new ways to improve the organization. They are risk-takers.
2. Inspiring a shared vision--the leadership practice demonstrated by the leaders' passion for their work, believing they can make a difference. Leaders have a vision of the future and a unique image of the organization's possibilities. They inspire this same vision and dream in their constituents. They become dream makers.
3. Enabling others to act--the leadership practice of facilitating collaboration and building inspired teams. Constituents are actively involved--leadership is a team

effort. Leaders promote mutual respect and create an atmosphere of trust. "When people have more discretion more authority, and more information, they are much more likely to use their energies to produce extraordinary results" (Kouzes and Posner, 1995, p. 12).

4. Modeling the way--the leadership practice of leading through personal example. Leaders are clear about their guiding principles.
5. Encouraging the heart--the leadership practice of celebrating follower and organizational successes. Leaders promote people's heroic feelings.

Each of these practices is embedded within the relationships between leaders and followers and will become the lens through which this study examines middle and high school principal behaviors.

Methodology

The research on which this analysis is based was conducted as a part of a larger study examining the relationship between the leadership behaviors of secondary school principals and the level of shared decision making in schools as perceived by teachers. The population for the study was a sample selected from all 42 middle and high schools (grades 6-12) in a large urban, public school district. The school system encompasses 154 schools, serving 126,000 students of which 60,000 are in secondary schools. The student populace is characterized as 54% white, non-minority and 46% minority with the most represented minority group being African American (40.0%).

Due to the nature of the larger study, the sample was selected from secondary schools where the principal had at least two years of longevity. Schools where the principal had less than two years tenure were excluded from this study.

The data were collected using Kouzes and Posner's (1997) Leadership Practices Inventory-Observer (LPI) which measures five practices (a) challenging the process, (b) inspiring a shared vision, (c) enabling others to act, (d) modeling the way, and (e) encouraging the heart. Each of the five practices is measured using six statements, making the total instrument 30 questions in length. A 10-point scale allows the participants the opportunity to indicate the degree to which the leader behaves as described.

The LPI was originally developed using a case study analysis of more than 1,100 managers' "personal best experiences" (Kouzes & Posner, 1997, p.1). Subsequently, over 5,000 additional managers and subordinates from various disciplines and organizations were involved in further validity and reliability studies. These studies revealed an internal reliability ranging from .70 to .91 and test-retest reliability of at least .93 in all five leadership practices.

All 1841 teachers in the 26 schools, where the principal had at least two years of longevity in the school, were requested to complete a LPI. The sample consisted of 242 participants from 12 middle schools and 404 participants from 14 high schools. who returned the survey. These 646 respondents represented a 35% rate of return from the 1841 teachers surveyed and 22% of the total secondary teachers in the school system.

A variety of statistical tools were employed in the analysis of data. These statistical tests included independent sample t-tests and the use of other descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and frequency.

Since the findings of this study were greatly dependent upon the measurement instrument for leadership behavior, the study was limited to the extent that the instrument is valid and reliable. It also depended on the level of understanding of instrument items by the participants and their trust in the anonymity of the results. Finally, the lack of a qualitative component limited the type of information collected and analyzed. Qualitative data would surely add depth to the findings of this study. Qualitative inquiry may be a suitable method for follow-up studies.

Discussion of Findings

Table 1 reports the results of the responses on the Leadership Practices Inventory generated by the participants. Forty-four of these participants' surveys were excluded for incomplete responses. Due to the nature of the scale the results are reported by frequencies.

Table 1

Summary of Leadership Practices of Middle School Principals (percentages)

Practice	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Challenging the Process										
Middle	0	1.4	7.2	8.2	11.4	16.8	21.4	15.4	16.8	1.4
High	0	.8	5.7	8.2	12.3	15.4	18.9	21.2	15.1	2.4
All	0	1.0	6.3	8.1	12.0	15.9	19.8	19.1	15.8	2.0
Inspiring a Shared Vision										
Middle	.5	.9	6.3	8.2	10.9	15.0	19.6	18.6	17.7	2.3
High	0	1.3	3.4	8.4	13.6	17.3	18	18.4	15.4	4.2
All	.2	1.2	4.5	8.3	12.6	16.4	18.6	18.4	16.3	3.5
Enabling Others to Act										
Middle	.5	4.0	8.7	8.2	9.5	12.3	13.6	16.8	13.7	12.7
High	.5	2.6	6.1	8.3	10.2	12.1	16.5	13.9	19.1	10.7
All	.5	3.2	7.0	8.3	10.0	12.1	15.4	15.0	17.1	11.5
Modeling the Way										
Middle	.5	3.1	6.4	9.1	11.8	12.7	16.4	10.9	18.6	10.5
High	.5	2.1	6.0	7.4	10.4	15.5	13.6	14.7	18.3	11.5
All	.5	2.5	6.1	8.0	11.0	14.5	14.6	13.3	18.4	11.1
Encouraging the Heart										
Middle	0	.9	7.3	9.5	14.6	17.2	16.0	16.8	17.2	.5
High	0	1.6	5.7	6.3	16.0	13.3	18.9	21.7	15.7	.8
All	0	1.3	6.3	7.5	15.4	14.8	17.8	19.9	16.3	.7

Note. 1 = almost never, 2 = rarely, 3 = seldom, 4 = once in a while, 5 = occasionally 6 = sometimes, 7 = fairly often, 8 = usually, 9 = very frequently, 10 = almost always

Challenging the Process

The first practice, challenging the process, encourages the leader to be a risk-taker, by identifying ineffective policies and procedures and experimenting with new and improved ones. Approximately 34% of middle school teachers and 39% of the high school teachers reported that their principals engaged in this practice "usually" to "almost always".

One of the important skills associated with this practice is the act of critical thinking, a skill that can be acquired through methodical practice. Principal preparation must provide prospective school leaders with experiences, which enhance critical thinking. It is only by challenging the status quo that true school reform will be accomplished.

Inspiring a Shared Vision

One of the most difficult practices, inspiring a shared vision (the image of the future that provides focus for all activities), requires the leader to communicate this vision in such a way as to motivate the followers to work toward its achievement. About 39% of the middle school teachers reported observing their principal inspiring a shared vision "usually" to "almost always". While 39% of high school teachers perceived their principal as "usually" to "almost always" inspiring a shared vision. On the other hand 27% of both middle and high school teachers indicated that their principals only occasionally to almost never inspired a shared vision.

Kouzes and Posner (1995) asserted that although the vision was cooperatively developed with all stakeholders, the leader must articulate it and provide focus. To accomplish this, successful leaders must utilize charismatic leadership strategies and communication to sell the vision to the entire organization.

Enabling Others to Act

Critical to building a collaborative culture, the third practice, enabling others to act, engenders the development of cooperative goals through empowerment and trust building. This empowering behavior is the practice which middle and high school teachers perceive their principals exhibit most often. Over 43% of the middle school and 44% of high school participants reported their principals engage in this practice "usually" to "almost always".

Success in this practice is predicated upon the leader's ability to appropriately match the capabilities of an organization's human capital with the demands of the tasks. Organizational structures should be constructed to encourage group action, which requires the sharing of information, resources, and ideas. These structures provide opportunities for members of the organization to embrace positive interdependence and collegiality (Covey, 1989). Additionally, leaders must learn to exercise facilitating behaviors and become well accomplished in the areas of group dynamics and team building.

By sharing power the leader creates a feeling of influence and ownership in organizational success. Leaders may create a sense of covenant by cultivating followers' capacities to be successful. This sense of covenant increases the followers' commitment to organizational goals and loyalty to the leader (Sergiovanni, 1994b).

Modeling the Way

The fourth practice, modeling the way, builds upon Schein's (1992) strategies for leaders engaging in cultural change. As Schein stated, leaders must constantly endeavor to model desired behaviors through their actions. Leaders must be the "heroes" (Deal & Kennedy, 1982) of the organization by modeling a commitment to visionary goals and exemplary actions. This practice can best be described by the statement, "Titles are granted but it's your behavior that wins you respect" (Kouzes & Posner, 1995 p. 12). Teachers indicated that this practice was the second most often behavior exhibited by their principals. Forty percent of middle school and 45% of high school teachers reported that principals demonstrate this practice "usually" to "almost always" which represents the highest indicated practice for high school principals. Leaders must discover ways to become more visible as they perform their day-to-day, routine activities. Principal visibility produces a means through which modeling behaviors are facilitated.

Encouraging the Way

According to the teachers' responses in this study, unfortunately, the least often behavior exhibited by principals was the practice of encouraging the heart. Over thirty percent of middle and high school teachers perceive that their principals "occasionally" to "almost never" practice encouraging the heart. Through this practice the importance

of individual, and group contributions to the organization's accomplishments are highlighted.

Although reported as the least practiced by principals, this notion of encouraging the heart may be one of the most important functions of leadership. Teachers and students have a strong need to be continually motivated to improve their performance and achievement. In this era of high stakes testing and accountability teaching has become an increasingly stressful profession. Therefore, principals must become the promoters and supporters of the successes of the members of their learning communities. Such genuine care provides people with the spirit to overcome insurmountable obstacles. Once again it is essential for school practitioners and teachers of educational leadership to develop strategies through which individual and organizational successes are celebrated.

Differences in Middle and High School Practices

In that the culture of middle schools differs from that of high schools, the data were disaggregated by school level and t-tests was performed on each of the five practices to determine any significant differences in means between middle and high school teachers' responses. Using a .05 level of significance, no significant differences were identified between the means of the responses of middle and high school teachers for any of the five practices. Therefore, middle and high school teachers reported very similar perceptions of their principals' leadership practices.

Summary and Conclusions

The results of this study portray a somewhat promising view of the current status of school leadership. Over half of the responding teachers perceived both middle and high school principals as demonstrating Kouzes and Posner's (1995) effective leadership practices "fairly often' to "almost always". Although these results are encouraging, educational leaders and principal preparation programs must undertake the responsibility of improving our school leaders' abilities to employ effective leadership practices.

Future research in the area of principal leadership practices needs to be expanded to include teachers in other large urban school districts and smaller rural ones. A parallel study of elementary school principals might also be conducted.

Additionally, researchers should explore the relationship of the leadership practices of school principals and student achievement using Kouzes and Posner's (1995) construct of leadership. Each of these extensions of the present study would provide a deeper understanding of the complexities of the school principalship.

The praxis of school leadership is a dynamic process that must change as our society and the nature of schools change. Educational leadership models evolve from the application of leadership research. The findings of this study provide implications for the leadership of school principals as they become cultural leaders in their schools. The results inform the preparation of school leaders. Principal preparation programs must provide prospective principals with experiences that will nurture the skills necessary to promote strong learning communities. By identifying the current status of effective leadership practices in our schools, principal training programs can better respond to the needs of both preservice and inservice school leaders. This study adds another dimension to educators' construction of understanding of the principalship, creating another bridge between research, theory and principle-centered practice.

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